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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003926

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: TWO SUNNI ARAB INDEPENDENTS DISCOUNT CHANCES FOR SUNNI ARAB SUPPORT FOR CONSTITUTION

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Two relative Sunni Arab political independents told us earlier this week that Sunni Arabs likely will vote in force against the draft constitution on October 15. Hatem al-Mukhlis, from Salah ad-Din province, told us that it would be better for the Sunni Arabs to help draft a new constitution after the December 2005 elections. Shaykh Fawaz Jarba from Nineva in northwest Iraq told us that few people in his region know much about the draft. Both men perceived that many view the draft as helping the Kurds and threatening Iraq's national unity, and thus would not gain much support. Poloffs cautioned that the draft is the best way to maintain Iraq's national unity, but clearly convincing Sunni Arabs to support the constitution on October 15 is not going to be easy. End Summary.

View from Tikrit: Worry about National Unity

¶2. (C) Hatem al-Mukhlis, Editor in Chief of Al Watan newspaper and political hopeful, told PolOff September 20 that the constitution referendum should be postponed until after the December election to ensure better Sunni Arab representation in the drafting process. Mukhlis repeated warnings of the breakup of Iraq as Kurdish and Shia communities form their own regions. Mukhlis also claimed there is a concerted, Iranian effort to destabilize Iraq.

¶3. (C) Mukhlis recalled a meeting he attended in 2004 at which Kurdish officials changed the wording on their table setting tag from "Iraq" to "Kurdistan." He said the frequency of such separatist gestures has increased. Despite assurances by PolOff to the contrary, he insisted the current constitution will allow Kurdistan to open an embassy in Washington "within a few years."

¶4. (C) Mukhlis predicted that the constitution will pass in the referendum despite heavy Sunni Arab opposition. Mukhlis candidly revealed that many Sunni Arabs will vote against the constitution only to spite the perceived US pressure to pass it. He felt the new constitution would not improve the daily situation for any Iraqis.

More Splits Among Sunni Political Groups ?

¶5. (C) Mukhlis believes the main Sunni Arab political parties-- especially the Iraqi Council for National Dialogue (ICND)-- would continue to fracture along religious lines and form new factions of Islamic, secular, independent, and tribal groups. He said the September 20 call by ICND's Saleh Mutlak during the Hawija Conference to form a "National Front" stemmed from divisions within the Dialogue group. (Comment: while Mutlak has sought to line up support to overturn the draft constitution, other members of the Dialog group have pondered whether last-minute changes to the draft might be possible. However, as we have reported, the Sunni Arabs have not been able to agree on a common position and no one has been willing publicly to act independently. End Comment.)

How to Get Sunni Arabs into Iraqi Mainstream

¶6. (C) The solution offered by Mukhlis to decrease current instability would be to hire more Sunni Arabs into the Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army. PolOff outlined USG efforts to ensure Sunni Arab inclusion in democratic Iraq, but added that but there has been insufficient response from Sunni Arab leaders. Mukhlis countered that many do apply, but Shia leaders in the IP and IA reject Arab Sunni applicants.

A View from rural Nineva

¶7. (C) Separately, National Assembly member Shaykh Fawaz Jarba from the Shammar tribal region west of Mosul told PolCouns September 20 that he anticipated most of the Sunni

Arabs in his region would vote against the draft constitution on October 15. He knew of no local leader among the Sunni Arabs making a strong case for the draft. (He hastened to add that the National Dialog Council and Saleh Mutlak have little influence; they are perceived as ex-Baathists and a source of Iraq's present problems.) Jarba conceded that few knew much about the constitution. However, there was worry about what federalism means. There is also growing tension between Kurds and Sunni Arabs, and many Arabs perceive the constitution helps the Kurds. PolCouns rejoined that the constitution was the result of compromises but that the document would be the best way to keep the country together. Jarba did not disagree but said opposition already is very deep among the Sunni Arabs in western Nineva.

Khalilzad